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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN: WHAT TO EXPECT

REF: A) BRUSSELS 631; B) MUNICH 159

1.CORRECTED COPY OF BRUSSELS 1089

12. (SBU) Summary: The European Parliament (EP) is now focused on the June 10-13 European elections. As a result, there will be almost no legislative activity between early May and September. U.S.-EU relations, the war on terrorism and Iraq are likely to be themes in many MEPs' campaigns as they heat up in April-May. Another key campaign issue will be Turkey's EU accession -- EP approval is needed before any new member can join. The elections are expected to yield up to 60 percent turnover of MEPs, and our interlocutors, perhaps hastily, predict that the EPP-ED (Christian Democrats and Conservatives) will keep a plurality of seats with the PES (Socialists/Social Democrats) coming in second. In the post-election EP, the expected pro-Americanism and euroskepticism among many new-member-state MEPs will bear watching. END SUMMARY.

SERIES OF PRE-ELECTION REPORTS

13. (U) This is the second in a series of reports on the European elections. Septel provided general background on the European Parliament and the European elections system. Subsequent telegrams will go into more detail on the role of U.S.-EU relations in the elections, the reelection prospects of key MEPs, possible realignment of party groups and the expected influence of MEPs from the countries set to join the EU on May 1.

EP ACTIVITY FROM NOW TO SEPTEMBER

14. (U) Much of this year's remaining legislative work will be done in the three EP plenary sessions between now and May 6 (March 29-April 1, April 19-22, May 3-6). Resolutions or reports on the following issues of interest to the U.S. are set to be brought to a vote before the May closure: U.S.-EU relations, Guantanamo detentions, preparedness for EU entry of the ten countries set to join on May 1, progress of Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey towards EU accession, cross-border investment services within the EU (2nd reading), capital markets transparency directive (1st reading), use of labels to claim health benefits of food products (1st reading), harmonizing member-state legislation to enforce intellectual property rights (1st reading), open skies agreement with third countries including the U.S. (2nd reading). Resolutions on biometric data for passports and Passenger Name Record (PNR) may also be voted on by May.

15. (U) As of May 6, EP business will halt to allow MEPs to campaign at home. The post-election EP, (including the newly elected batch of new-member-state MEPs) will not meet again until July 20-23, at which time the main focus will be election of new EP officers and committee chairpersons. The first plenary after the August summer break will be September 13-16, at which voting on legislation will begin again in earnest. What is not finished before May 6 is put in abeyance until September, and must be formally revived by a decision of the EP leadership (Conference of Presidents) or it will die.

U.S.RELATIONS WILL BE CAMPAIGN ISSUE

16. (U) Officials in both the EPP and PES tell us that themes connected to transatlantic relations such as Iraq, the war on terrorism and the link between European Security and Defense Policy and NATO will be important campaign issues. In most of the new member states from the former East Bloc, we expect keeping close ties to the U.S. to be an especially prominent theme. Immigration issues, including worry in western Europe about jobs being taken by workers from the new member states, are also expected to be important trans-national themes (septel).

TURKEY ACCESSION: MANY AGAINST

17. (U) Another key issue for many will be Turkey's accession to the EU. No country can join the EU without an EP vote approving the accession. The Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) and many in its Christian-Democrat sister party (CDU) plan to run opposing Turkey's accession (ref B). In reaction to this, the German Social Democrats and Greens have reiterated their stance in favor of Turkish accession. Although it appears that now a majority of current MEPs favor Turkish accession, they are far ahead of their populations, opening the door for candidates to exploit this issue in their electoral campaigns.

SOME EXPECT CHRISTIAN-DEMOCRAT WIN...

18. (U) Our EP interlocutors are predicting that the EPP-ED will hold on to its plurality, but much can happen between now and June. With victory as their expressed goal, EPP-ED Chairman Hans-Gert Poettering and UK Conservative leader Michael Howard have negotiated a deal -- to be voted on by EPP-ED MEPs on March 31 -- keeping the British Conservatives in the EPP-ED. Although the EPP has consistently opposed U.S. policy on the ICC, the Kyoto Protocol and Guantanamo, it is the most pro-U.S. EP group. It includes in its ranks, in addition to the German Christian Democrats and the UK Conservatives, the Spanish Partido Popular, the Italian Forza Italia and the Dutch Christian Democrats. Partido Popular's surprise defeat in this weekend's elections may have an impact on campaign calculations, and could put a dent in the conventional wisdom predicting an EPP plurality.

...BUT CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS MAY SPLINTER

19. (U) EP interlocutors told us that, after the EPP-ED, the PES is expected to remain the second strongest party group, and that the Liberal Democrats (ELDR) should come in a strong third. The Greens should lose seats, as they are very weak in the new member states. One recent development, however, could throw a wrench in the works. On February 20 some members of the EPP (principally from the French UDF and the Belgian CDH) met in Rome with leaders of the ELDR and members of the Italian "Oliva" party (recently launched by Commission President Romano Prodi) to explore the possibility of creating a "true European Federalist party" - in explicit opposition to the EPP's inclusion of the euroskeptic UK conservatives. If this new party group does in fact emerge, the EPP could lose seats relative to the PES. Both of these major parties could also find themselves faced with a third centrist force significantly stronger than the current ELDR.

WHO WILL STAY AND WHO WILL GO

110. (SBU) According to the Parliament's EPP spokesman, the following key EPP-ED MEPs (and friends of the United States) are expected to return because of their high position on their party lists: Party Group Chairman Hans-Gert Poettering (Germany), Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Elmar Brok (Germany), Transatlantic Policy Network (TPN) Chief James Elles (UK), and Environment Committee Chairwoman Caroline Jackson (UK). In the PES, party group leader Enrique Baron Crespo has not yet decided whether to run for re-election. Many key PES MEPs such as Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee Chairwoman Christa Randzio-Plath (Germany) and PES Foreign Affairs Committee Coordinator Jannis Sakellariou (Germany) will not run for re-election. The leader of the ELDR group, Graham Watson, will probably be re-elected but may not remain as ELDR chairman. Other key ELDR MEPs such as Foreign Affairs Committee Vice Chair Baroness Nicholson (UK), whose record on transatlantic issues is mixed, and PNR rapporteur Johanna Boogerd-Quaak (Netherlands), who opposes the U.S. agreement with the European Commission on PNR, will probably be reelected. Franco-German Greens leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, elected on the French Green list in 1999, will underscore his standing as the premier force behind the recent formation of a Europe-wide Green Party by running as number two on the German Greens' list.

NEW MEMBER-STATE MEPS PRO-U.S.

111. (SBU) Altogether pundits expect the June elections to yield up to 60 percent first-time MEPs (including the 162 new-member-state MEPs), much more than in previous elections. We expect many MEPs from the 10 new countries to bring pro-U.S. attitudes and new-member euroskepticism, but their lack of EP experience will likely lead them to maintain a lower profile in the beginning. If a plurality of the new-member-state MEPs are EPP-ED members, they will

add to the weight of the pro-U.S. but euroskeptic British
Conservatives and Forza Italia. END COMMENT.

FOSTER